

BEWARE OF BARNA RELIGIOUS SURVEYS

June 4, 2000 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org) -- The religious surveys of the Barna Research Group, headed by George Barna, appear frequently in Christian and secular publications. They are also used in the church growth movement. The Barna Research web site advertises itself as "strategic information you can trust." I want to take exception to that by analyzing their May 30th report which is entitled "Asians and the Affluent Are Increasingly Likely to Be Born Again." This report is based on telephone interviews with a nationwide sampling of roughly 3000 adults.

Consider the following excerpt:

"While people are only slightly more likely to believe in Christ today than they were a decade ago, the fact that the nation's population has grown by ten percent resulted in about 10 million more adult believers than we had in 1991. . . . Barna offered a related observation as to why the growth of the born again population is not more evident. 'The largest share of the growth comes from among individuals making \$60,000 a year or more. Many of those individuals are living "the good life" and, upon analyzing the salvation proposal, determined that inviting Christ into their life is a smart choice. For many of these individuals, faith in Jesus is simply a good deal. They are not likely to view their faith decision as the catalyst of a lifestyle that demands sacrifice, selflessness and service. Faith in Christ represents an eternal insurance policy for them rather than a significant change of heart about the ultimate meaning of life, or how to honor Christ through their decisions, behavior and resources.'"

According to the Barna Research Group, 41% of all adults in North America are "born again." This, of course, is absolute nonsense from a biblical perspective and this type of reporting creates much confusion. We can see from the previous statement by Barna that he accepts any type of "profession of faith," no matter how shallow, as the new birth. He describes men who receive Christ as a "smart choice," in an attempt merely to add an eternal insurance policy to their well-to-do lifestyle even though they have no intention to serve Jesus Christ in a Bible fashion. Barna admits that these have no "significant change of heart" and that they have no intention to honor Christ by how they live; yet these men figure into his born again statistics.

In fact, the Lord Jesus Christ said plainly that no man can be saved if he does not repent. "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13,3,5). The Apostle Paul summarized the message he preached in these words: "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Biblical salvation is exemplified in the believers at Thessalonica. "For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how YE TURNED TO GOD FROM IDOLS TO SERVE THE LIVING AND TRUE GOD" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Nothing less is true salvation.

When the rich young ruler came to Christ and expressed his interest in eternal life, the Lord Jesus Christ forced him to consider his covetous heart in order to take away his self-righteousness (Matthew 19:16-24; Mark 10:17-23). Christ did not tell the rich young ruler

to say some sort of sinner's prayer and then pronounce him saved. The young man was trusting in his own moral uprightness and felt that he deserved God's blessing. Furthermore, he did not know who Jesus Christ was. He thought of Christ as a "Good Master," but Christ reminded him that only God is good. If Jesus Christ was not Almighty God, He was not good. It is impossible to believe on Christ in a saving manner in the condition of the rich young ruler.

Likewise, when many Jews "believed" on Jesus because of the miracles, the Bible tells us that Christ did not commit himself to them because he knew the insincerity and misplaced faith of their hearts.

"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (John 2:23-25).

They wanted an earthly savior who would provide their physical desires and protect them from their enemies (John 6:14,15,26). When Christ preached that He is the eternal Bread which came down from Heaven and that to be saved a person must partake of His blood atonement, most of these people revealed the true unbelief on their hearts and turned away from him (John 6:26-66). Many of the alleged "born again" people in the Barna surveys are in precisely the same condition. The Thessalonian believers turned to God from their idols, but these Americans think they can have Jesus Christ plus their idols. They are deceived, but most of America's preachers are too cowardly or too ignorant themselves of spiritual things or too often busy building their little religious empires to tell them.